

GARY LOCKE
Governor



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Gov. Gary Locke Calls for Aggressive Policy Changes to Protect the U.S. Beef Supply and Restore Public Confidence

SEATTLE – Dec. 30, 2003 – Gov. Gary Locke today unveiled an aggressive plan to protect the U.S. beef supply from mad cow disease (BSE) and to restore public confidence in meat products.

The governor applauded the proposal released earlier today by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, but he said additional steps must be taken to ensure the beef and dairy industries remain viable in Washington state.

"Our beef is safe to eat," Locke said. "Federal safety regulations now in place protect our beef supply; however, we can and must do more over the long term to keep the public's faith in the safety of beef products."

Locke said he supports the federal proposal mandating that no meat from "downer" cattle should be allowed to enter the market for human consumption. The governor's plan also echoes the federal government's call for establishing a national livestock identification system. Such a system would enable the quick and efficient tracking of the origin and movement of cattle anywhere in the country.

The governor, however, called for further steps beyond the federal plan. He proposed that all "downer" cattle should be tested, and that a system to expand testing to rendering plants and farms should be evaluated.

Locke also called for the development of a fast, routine and economical BSE test of all live cattle. Currently, a BSE test can only be done on slaughtered cattle. The creation of a live cattle test would help lay the foundation for broader testing and even greater safety.

Finally, to improve the timeliness of BSE test results, the governor called on the federal government to certify state laboratories to test for BSE. This would relieve the burden on the single national testing facility in Ames, Iowa.

“I support the governor in these safeguards to increase public safety,” said Valoria Loveland, director of the state Department of Agriculture. “These measures will help us protect the integrity of the agriculture industry, consumer confidence in the food supply and our essential international markets.”

The governor commended the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration for their rapid response to the state’s BSE incident. He also thanked the state departments of Agriculture, Health and Ecology for their hard work and support for the federal investigation.

Locke spoke with Veneman yesterday and asked that the USDA purchase any cattle prior to depopulation so farmers don’t suffer further financial hardship.

Earlier today, the governor spoke with Yakima-area officials to share the latest information, hear their concerns and assure them that the state would continue to work diligently on their behalf with the federal government.

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